

WASHINGTON, DC-Today, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) made the following opening statement as the House International Relations Committee began debate on House Joint Resolution 114, which would authorize the use of US armed forces against Iraq:

“Since becoming a member of Congress, I’ve been struck by the gap between the needs and the concerns of the public and our ability to hear and give voice to those needs and those concerns. Nowhere is that gap between the people and their government wider than what is currently happening over a possible war with Iraq.

“People suspect that part of the instability in the Middle East is the result of our past missteps and miscalculations, giving aid and comfort to Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, not thinking it through fully at the front end, and then walking away when our attention is diverted or we become fatigued. People want to know, “What’s the rush? What’s changed?” and they are skeptical about what appears to be political timing.

“The responses from constituents who formally contact our offices are overwhelmingly opposed to war with Iraq, often by ratios of 100:1 or 500:1. I think the American public has it right. We’re not finished with the war on terrorism and this is highly distinct from our ongoing conflict with Iraq.

“We’re not finished yet in Afghanistan. President Karzai is barely the mayor of Kabul, and owes his life to American Delta Force bodyguards. It is not clear that we or the countries who supported us in Afghanistan are ready to do what it takes to finish the job in that nation. Indeed, we’re not even finished yet in the Balkans.

“It has been an open secret on Capitol Hill that, contrary to some of the administration’s formal pronouncements, there’s been much greater caution and skepticism from the leaders in the Pentagon. Former generals have openly declared their concerns before Congress.

“No president deserves a blank check when it comes to dealing with declaring war. I am not opposed to the use of force. I have supported it in the past, and could do so in the future. This is a situation where neither the case has been made, nor the foundation established.

“I urge the leadership and the diverse membership of this committee to be part of a

diplomatic solution internationally, and to engage honestly with the American public here at home. Congress and the American people have a right to know the costs and consequences before following this path. We should reject the notion of a pre-emptive, unilateral, go-it-alone attack on anyone we deem a threat. A unilateral preemptive strike, without direct provocation, is both wrong and dangerous, especially when undertaken by the most powerful nation the world has ever seen.

“If we can’t live up to our principles, how can we expect other countries to obey the rule of law? To respect the integrity of a reasonable strategic diplomatic and moral position by the United States is not to imply any sympathy for Saddam Hussein and his brutal regime.

“There is, in fact, a huge bipartisan consensus in Congress: to work with our allies--not tell them what they must do beforehand; to use the United Nations to lay the foundation for a muscular aggressive regime for effective inspections and enforcement of United Nations resolutions. Such an approach will be the most likely to produce the results the administration claims it wants. It is entirely consistent with where the American public is, based on the most accurate measurement: what we actually hear from people when we take the time to reach out to them. In the final analysis we 535 Representatives and Senators should not be driven by polls or focus groups. We should ultimately be driven by what we know to be right.

“The situation in the Middle East is the most volatile it has been in our lifetime. Iraq is but one troubling part of the equation. Yet this can be the beginning of a new chapter of diplomacy and thoughtful action on the part of the United States. I know the Committee can be equal to this challenge.”